

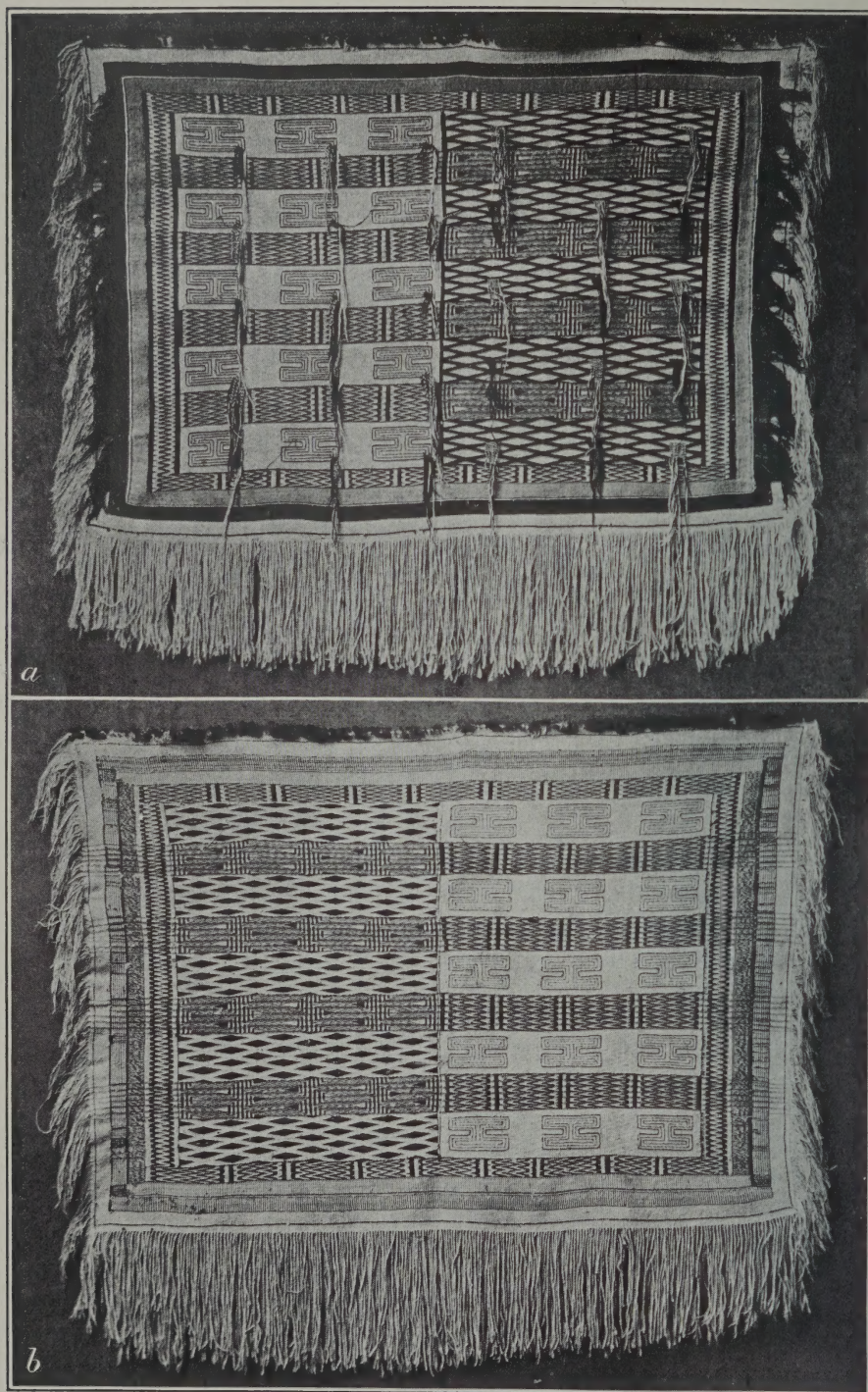
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A NEW TYPE OF CEREMONIAL BLANKET FROM THE NORTHWEST COAST

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Ceremonial Blanket of mountain-goat wool brought from the Northwest Coast by Captain Benjamin Swift about the year 1800. *a*, outer side; *b*, inner side.

A NEW TYPE OF CEREMONIAL BLANKET FROM THE NORTHWEST COAST

By CHARLES C. WILLOUGHBY

THROUGH the generosity of Mr Lewis H. Farlow of Boston and Pasadena, the Peabody Museum of Harvard University has recently acquired a remarkable Northwest Coast blanket. This was found in possession of a grandson of the collector by Dr L. C. Jones of Malden, Massachusetts, who called the writer's attention to this interesting textile.

The blanket was obtained about the year 1800 by Captain Benjamin Swift (1770-1857) of Charlestown, Massachusetts, who, in his younger days, was engaged in the Northwest fur trade. Like most ethnological specimens collected in that region by the early "Boston" traders there is no record of the exact locality where it was procured. It is very probable, however, that it came from the northern coast region of British Columbia.

With the exception of the overcasting of fur at its upper edge the robe is made wholly of mountain goat wool. Unlike the Chilkat blanket no cedar bark was used in the warp. The colors are yellow, a brownish black, and the natural white of the wool.

The color scheme is as follows: the outer band of the border is white with a narrow black line (pl. I, *a*), then a band of black somewhat more than an inch wide; within this and separated from it by a black and white line is a yellow band of the same width. The border of zigzags and bars within the yellow band and enclosing the central field is principally in black and white, the yellow being confined to four spaces upon each of the shorter sides. These

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yellow cords continue across the blanket and form the yellow portion of the inner field. This inner field is divided into two parts. The left half is made up of five white bands each having three I-shaped figures in black; and four narrower bands composed of short upright bars and zigzags in black, white, and yellow. The decoration of the right half of the field is composed of five wide bands having a lattice figure in black upon a white ground; and alternate narrower bands consisting of an intricate pattern in black, white, and yellow with a triangle for a motif. There are five horizontal rows of tufts composed of braided black, or black and white strands, six tufts in each row, which decorate the outer side of the central field. Most of these are composed of ends of short woof cords and are not inserted separately. These pendant cords seem to be analogous to the strips of fur which decorate the outer side of skin robes once common throughout the northwest.

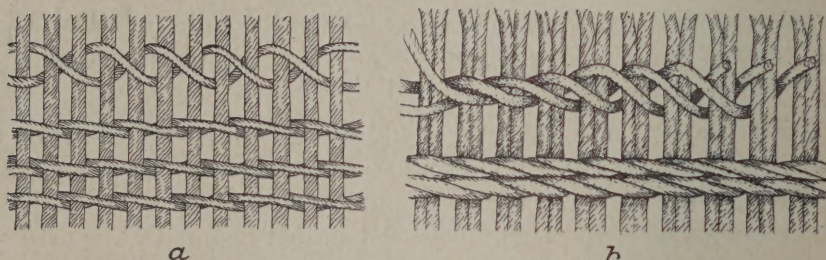


FIG. 1. — Types of weaving, Swift blanket. *a*, Diagonal twined weaving; *b*, three-strand twined weaving.

Most of the patterns which compose the decoration of this robe are common to the Tlingit, Tsimshian, Chilkotin (Athapascan) and northern Salishan peoples, but they seem to bear the closest resemblance to the basket and embroidery designs of the northern half of this region. For a general account of the symbolism embodied in these designs the reader is referred to the writings of Emmons, Teit, and Fernald, and to the forthcoming paper of Dr. Newcombe on the blankets of the Salish.

The grouping of the various units composing the designs of this robe is excellent and shows a high degree of primitive artistic feeling. The most remarkable thing about the robe however is its

technic ; so far as known it shows the highest development of hand weaving among North American tribes. It belongs to an altogether different class from the well known Chilkat blanket in which the various parts of the designs are woven separately by twining double strands of the desired color back and forth across the warp cords until each unit of the design is completed in solid color, the finished blanket being, so to speak, a mosaic in different colors, a technic also common in the variously colored blankets of the Salishan people. The line of junction of the different units composing the design in the Chilkat blanket is covered and outlined by one or more rows of three strand twining (fig. 1, *b*) a weave also present in the Swift blanket, where it is used in forming the I-shaped figures, and as a dividing line between the black and yellow bands of the border, also as a black line near the outer edge of the robe.

The vertical warp cords of the Swift robe are twice as long as the blanket is deep and are looped at the top like the warp in the Chilkat blanket, their lower ends forming a deep fringe. The horizontal woof cords are about half the diameter of those of the warp and are, with few exceptions, continuous, the outer ends of the white and yellow cords being knotted in groups of two and four to form the outer fringe upon either side, while the ends of the black cords form an inner fringe. Unlike the Chilkat blanket, where much of the fringe is composed of inserted cords, this fringe consists wholly of the ends of the warp and woof strands. The ingenious method of finishing the lower part of the woven portion by looping to prevent fraying is shown in fig. 2. Beginning at the left a two-strand twined weaving encloses three cords, the second and third of which are turned upward upon themselves and are again enclosed within the next twist of the double woof strands. In this manner a double fringe is formed, the outer row having twice the number of cords of the inner row.

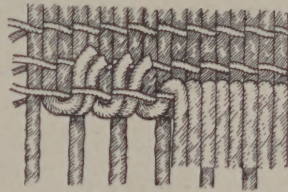


FIG. 2.—Method of finishing lower edge of Swift Blanket.

The narrow white outer band near the edge of the blanket at the top and bottom beyond the black line, and the white band on either side beneath the black fringe, also a portion of the white

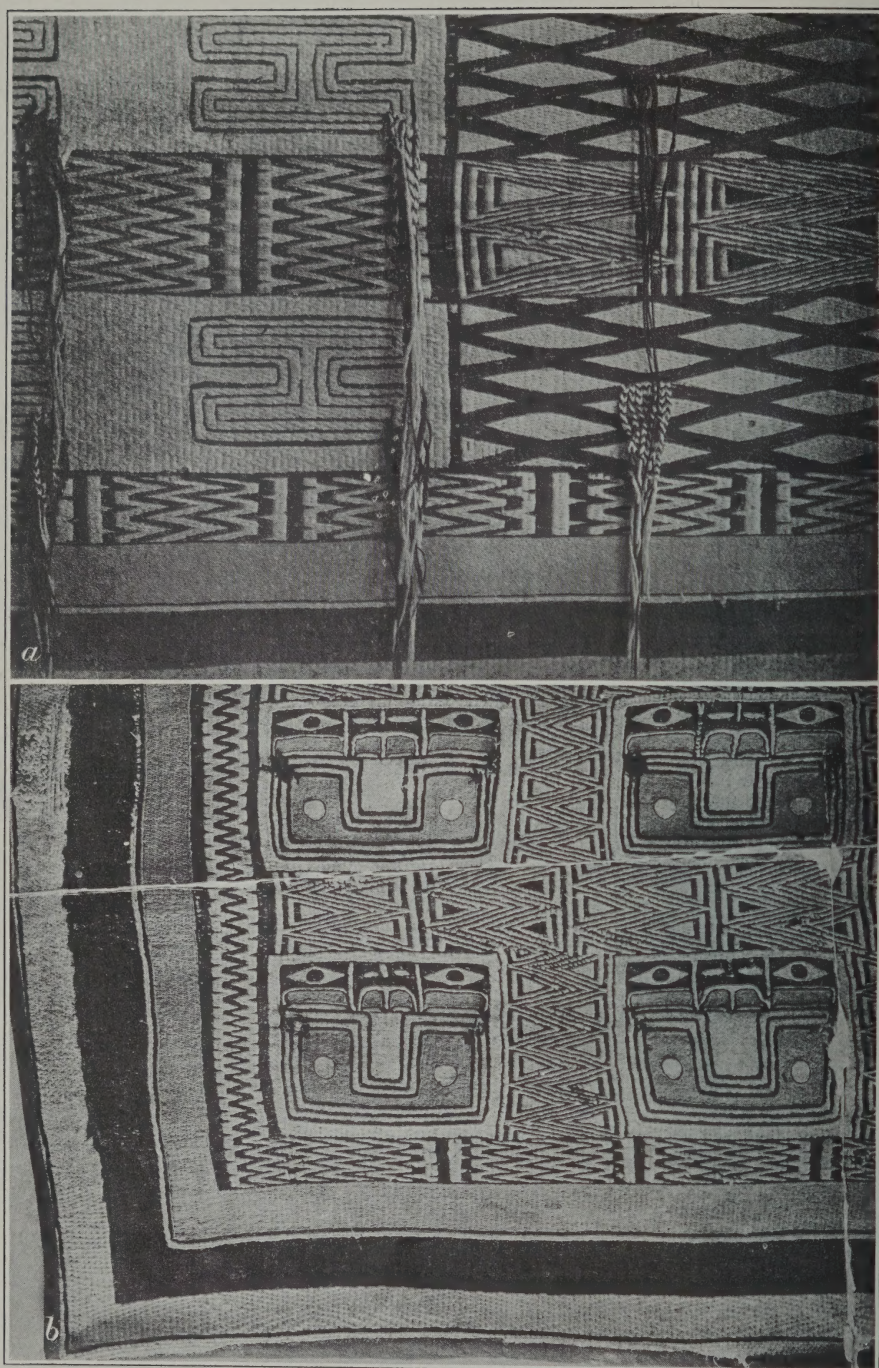
ground within the I-shaped figures are of the diagonal twined weaving shown in figs. 1, *a* and 2, while the broader white band at the top and bottom within the black line is of twined weaving with a skip-stitch zigzag pattern. The fields composing the background of the I-shaped figures are in white. They are alike on both sides, and are also in twined weaving with a skip-stitch lattice design (fig. 3), a technic extensively used by the Chilkat in their baskets and basket hats (see also pl. II, *a*, for detail of this and the following types of weaving). The broad outer black and yellow bands forming, so to speak, the frame for the inner design, consist of a new variety of weave (fig. 4, *a*), with an occasional line of three strand twine. This new technic is a double wrapped twining, two smaller cords



FIG. 3. --- "Skip-stitch" twined weaving, Swift blanket.

upon the front occupying the corresponding space of one larger cord upon the back. In this way a fine smooth surface of color is produced, the cloth being as firm as other portions of the blanket where the coarser cords bring out more clearly the com-

plicated patterns. The entire field within this black and yellow border with the exception of the white bars containing the I-shaped figures and an occasional line of three strand twining is made up of zigzag, lattice, and other patterns in mixed twine weaving (fig. 4, *b*), a combination of both diagonal twined and diagonal wrapped twined weaving, which gives the weaver perfect control of the variously colored strands in forming her designs. This is a modified form of a widely distributed method well developed among certain Algonquian and Siouan tribes in the making of cloth bags and is also followed in the construction of pliable basketry by some of the Pacific coast tribes. It reaches its highest development in this garment. Each woof cord is composed of a black and a white strand or a black and a yellow strand and is usually continuous throughout the pattern. The distribution of the yellow strands is clearly shown by



a, Section of Swift Blanket (pl. 1) showing detail.

b, Section of fragment of blanket in Museum of Geological Survey of Canada.

the intermediate shade upon the inner side of the blanket (pl. I, *b*) near the outer edges where they are knotted and form part of the fringe. They may also be distinguished in the horizontal band between the two I-shaped figures in pl. II, *a*. The colors of the patterns composing this inner field are reversed, the blanket having a positive and a negative side, a characteristic wanting in most other known Northwest blankets. As will be seen in the

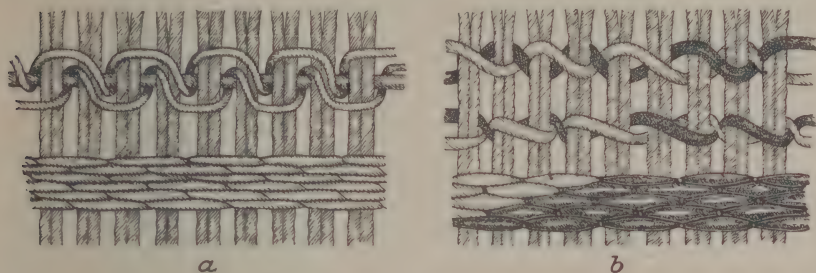


FIG. 4.—Types of weaving, Swift blanket. *a*, Double wrapped twined weaving; *b*, mixed twined weaving composed of diagonal twined and diagonal wrapped twined weaving.

drawing (fig. 4, *b*) each double woof cord is composed of two strands of different colors twined in such a manner that either color appears upon the surface at will. One or two double warp cords are included in each twist of the double woof strands as the pattern may require but the manipulation of the woof strands throughout the entire field is as illustrated in the drawing, the relative arrangement of the two methods of twining there shown varying of course as the pattern changes. Unlike the Chilkat and most other twine woven blankets of the Northwest, where each unit of a design is woven independently in one color, in this blanket the woof cord of two differently colored strands is inserted in one continuous line, each twist forming a portion of the many adjacent figures, a method requiring a high degree of efficiency on the part of the weaver.

In most other examples of mixed twined weaving the two sides of the cloth are technically different. This is owing to the greater tension of some of the strands at the back. In this blanket the strands are drawn with equal tension and the weaving has the same appearance upon either side although the colors are reversed.

Of the many varieties of hair, wool, and vegetal fibre used in former times for weaving textiles by the Indians throughout the United States and in certain sections of Canada, the wool of the mountain goat was especially adapted to this work. Within its restricted area it was fairly abundant, required little preparation for use and took the primitive dyes admirably. It was not always necessary to kill the animal to secure the wool, for in the spring and summer when the coat is being shed "every bush and tall dry weed above timber line is festooned with tufts of wool that can be picked off in handfuls."

Goat wool formed a considerable article of commerce and was exchanged by the interior tribes with the people of the coast for shells and other coast products. Blankets of goat wool or of dog fleece were in use from the Columbia River, where they are recorded by Lewis and Clark, to the Chilkat in Alaska. In certain sections of the southern region the hair of the dog, and perhaps of other animals, and the down of birds were also used, either with or without the addition of goat wool. The dog was of a woolly haired variety extensively bred for its white fleece, from which was woven a considerable part of the clothing of the people of the Puget sound region and adjacent territory. The fleece was removed from the live animal, probably with shell knives. Vancouver, doubtless the first European to come in contact with the Puget sound tribes, thus describes this animal.¹ "The dogs belonging to this tribe of Indians were numerous, and much resembled those of Pomerania, though in general somewhat larger. They were all shorn as close to the skin as sheep are in England; and so compact were their fleeces that large portions could be lifted up by a corner without causing any separation. They were composed of a mixture of a coarse kind of wool, with very fine, long hair, capable of being spun into yarn. This gave me reason to believe that their woollen clothing might in part be composed of this material mixed with a finer kind of wool from some other animal, as their garments were all too fine to be manufactured from the coarse coating of the dog alone. The abundance of these garments among the few people we met with, indicates the animal from whence the raw material is procured to

¹ Vancouver's Discovery of Puget sound, Meany reprint, p. 136.

be very common in this neighborhood; but as they have no one domesticated excepting the dog, their supply of wool for their clothing can only be obtained by hunting the wild creature that produces it; of which we could not obtain the least information."

On another occasion he writes of meeting about 200 Indians "some in canoes with their families, others walking along the shore attended by about 40 dogs in a drove, shorn close to their skin like sheep."¹ Of the clothing of this region he writes, "Their native woolen garment was most in fashion, next to it the skins of deer, bear, etc.; a few wore dresses manufactured from bark, which, like their woolen ones were very neatly wrought."²

There are two old Salishan blankets in the Peabody Museum at Cambridge. These were collected by Roderick McKensie previous to 1819. The first, from Fraser river, is in coarse diagonal twined weaving, a technic shown in figs. 1, *a* and 2. It seems to be made principally of goat wool. It is fringed but not otherwise ornamented. The second specimen is made of dog hair and bird down, with perhaps some goat wool, and is twilled woven. The ornamentation consists of narrow brown lines a few inches apart, crossing each other at right angles. Like most blankets of this southern region it is fringed.

A blanket from the lower Fraser is illustrated in Dr Newcombe's recently published guide to the anthropological collection in the Provincial Museum at Victoria. Its central field is twilled woven. It is decorated with bars composed of diamond-shaped figures in black and white. The decoration of the border consists principally of groups of black and white diamonds intersecting. These are apparently in simple twined weaving, the patterns being in solid color. A few other old dog hair or goat wool blankets are known which may be attributed to this southern region, the finer specimens being in various colors, with patterns consisting of squares, zigzags, and other simple figures. Technically the weaving is similar to that of the Chilkat robes, most of the designs being in solid color alike on both sides. There are two blankets of this type in the National Museum, one of which was collected by Wilkes. Dr

¹ Vancouver's *Discovery of Puget Sound*, Meany reprint, p. 162.

² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Newcombe has kindly sent the writer photographs of a blanket and a rug of the same type of weaving from the lower Fraser river. These will be described in his paper to be published by the Field Museum.

The Makah¹ and neighboring Salishan tribes made blankets of hair or wool combined with bird down. There is a beautiful specimen of this type in the National Museum. The inner field is plain, the cords of which it is woven being nearly concealed by fluffy down caught into the strands. The inner field of the finished fabric has much the appearance of being composed wholly of down as the woven portion shows but little. The garment is finished with a wide fringed border without the addition of down, woven in pleasing colored patterns. The above blankets belong to an altogether different class from the Swift robe.

Captain Cook writes as follows of the blankets of the Nootka:² "They are of different degrees of fineness, some resembling our coarsest rugs or blankets and others almost equal to our finest sort, or even softer, and certainly warmer. The wool of which they are made seems to be taken from different animals, as the fox and the brown lynx, the last of which is by far the finer sort; and in its natural state differs little from the color of our coarser wool, but the hair with which the animal is also covered, being intermixed, its appearance when wrought is somewhat different. The ornamental parts or figures in the garments, which are disposed with great taste, are commonly of a different color, being dyed, chiefly either of a deep brown, or of a yellow; the last of which when it is new equals the best of our carpets as to brightness."

Dr Newcombe has also forwarded a photograph of a somewhat dilapidated blanket, a portion of one end only being shown. This was obtained about the year 1793 and is now in the British Museum. The inner field consists of a lattice design with diamond-shaped figures in black and white within the spaces formed by the cross-bars. There is an inner border of the zigzag design and an outer border of yellow (?), black, and white bands as in the Swift specimen. This blanket is undoubtedly of the same origin as the Swift

¹ Charles Wilkes, *United States Exploring Expedition*, vol. iv, p. 488.

² Cook's *Voyages*, vol. vii, p. 325, Admiralty Edition.

robe, the types of weaving being the same in the two specimens. They differ essentially from the lower Fraser blankets above noted. A portion of a third blanket of the same origin as the Swift robe is in the museum of the Geological Survey of Canada. This has been made into a tunic or shirt as is often the case with fragments of ceremonial robes that have been cut up at potlatches. A section of this is illustrated in pl. II, *b*. The ground is composed of zigzags and triangles like those upon the Swift robe and the technic of this portion of the two blankets is the same. Four conventionalized faces of the usual Northwest type appear at regular intervals, and below each is a design resembling one half of an I-shaped figure, such as appears on the Swift robe, split vertically through its center and turned upon its side. These faces and the latter figures are apparently woven in the same manner as those in the Chilkat blanket. There were originally tufts of pendant cords upon the surface, as will be seen by a close examination of the photograph. The curator of the museum could give the writer no information as to the origin of the specimen.¹ These three blankets doubtless occupy a geographical position between the well known Chilkat blanket of the north and the blankets of the Salishan people of the south. Technically they form a class by themselves. The only other examples of the peculiar type of mixed twined weaving shown in these blankets thus far known to the writer occur in the wool border of a cedar bark robe in the British Museum and also in the lower portion of the borders of very old Chilkat blankets. It is an interesting fact that the pattern of these borders is also like certain portions of the ground of both robes shown in plate II. Take for instance the narrow long section above the two upper conventionalized faces in figure *b* of this plate and we have a close reproduction of this border, both in technic and design.

The cedar bark robe above referred to is illustrated on plate xxiv, figure 2, of Emmons' memoir on the Chilkat blanket, and is

¹ The photograph from which the illustration (pl. II, *b*) was reproduced was kindly furnished the writer by the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. A drawing of this blanket is also shown on p. 388, fig. 581, *b*, of Emmons' paper on the Chilkat Blanket, *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. iii, pt. iv.

supposed to have been obtained from the western coast of Vancouver island. If it came from that region, as seems probable, it is doubtless of Wakashan origin. In the Chilkat blanket the same kind of mixed twined weaving, forming a small section of the zig-zag design above noted, appears on the lower portion of the borders of a beautiful old specimen in the Peabody Museum at Salem obtained previous to 1832, and also on another old specimen in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. This mark seems to be of traditional significance. In later blankets the mark has degenerated into a simple binding of black and yellow cords. The same pattern also occurs in the center of the Fraser river rug above referred to, but the weaving is of a different kind. It seems probable that the Swift robe is neither Tlingit nor Salishan. It undoubtedly came from the mainland and probably from the northern coast region of British Columbia, but more data are necessary before it can be definitely located in any section of this region. The writer will be glad to hear of other specimens of this type of blanket which may be known to readers of this paper.

PEABODY MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
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